THE EFFECTS OF A REFLECTIVE COACHING PROJECT FOR VETERAN TEACHERS

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This article reports the outcomes of a yearlong reflective coaching project involving a school district and a university. More specifically, the article describes how the project changed 25 veteran teachers' behavior and their thinking about teaching.

CONTEXT

The intervention was a yearlong partnership during the 1988–89 school year between the university and a semi-rural school district in the Northeast. The major goal of the project was to equip a cadre of 25 veteran classroom teachers and 5 administrators with the skills and knowledge needed to function successfully as peer coaches for their colleagues during the 1989–90 school year. Because the administrators did not teach on a regular basis, we do not address the effects of the project on them here. The major actors in the project were the 25 teachers who were preparing to become peer coaches for the 1989–90 school year, 10 doctoral students who served as reflective coaches for the 25 teachers during the 1988–89 school year, and 2 assistant professors who served as project directors and delivered workshops on instructional effectiveness.

Before forming the partnership with the university, a staff development committee composed of district administrators and teachers spent a year planning a districtwide program. The committee was a joint venture of the
central administration and the local teachers' association. Part of the motivation for the plan arose from a desire among the association and the administration to engage in a cooperative project that might help to heal the remaining wounds from a bitter teacher strike in 1986–87. The committee members looked at the literature on staff development and also spent considerable time visiting other districts and intermediate units to get a firsthand look at various models of staff development before writing a plan targeted primarily at preparing a cadre of teachers to serve as peer coaches for their colleagues.

The Teachers

The 25 teachers involved in the project came from two distinct groups. Half of the teachers had been involved in the yearlong planning process during the 1987–88 school year; the others volunteered to participate in the project at the beginning of the 1988–89 school year. The years of teaching experience among the teachers ranged from 6 to 27, and the teachers represented a wide range of grade levels and content areas. At least 5 of the teachers were officers or executive board members of the local teachers' association. One teacher had earned a doctorate, several teachers had master's degrees, and several others were involved in graduate study at other higher education institutions. Most of the teachers reported that they had been involved in district inservice activities but that they could not recall ever being involved in any meaningful, long-term staff development before this project.

On the day of the first workshop, we introduced the teachers and coaches briefly and allowed them to interact and talk casually with each other during the course of the day's activities. At the end of that first day, we matched each coach with a triad of people based primarily on the geographic proximity of the three teachers and also on any expressed teacher-coach preference.

The Coaches

The coaches were all doctoral-level graduate students. Each doctoral student coached three people during the project, either all teachers or, in five cases, two teachers and one administrator. Each coach had completed a semester-long course in the systematic observation of instruction as well as a semester-long course in clinical supervision. Each doctoral student also had at least one semester of experience supervising preservice teachers in the field. The coaches’ prior teaching experience at the elementary and secondary level varied widely. The number of years of teaching experience in basic education ranged from 7 to 19, with an average of about 13 years.

The coaches were committed to the basic philosophy and goals of reflective coaching and were skilled in its implementation. They saw coaching as a collegial process and were committed to enabling the teacher to become more analytical, reflective, and self-directed. During the project, the coaches met as a group with the professors in charge of the project to discuss triumphs,
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concerns, and problems. The coaches also kept their own reflective journals on the coaching process.

REFLECTIVE COACHING MODEL

As originally written, the staff development plan presented a technical model of coaching, with workshops on instructional effectiveness the primary component, followed by peer coaching visits for peer coaches to judge how effectively the teachers used the techniques presented in the workshop. Between May and August 1988, through a lengthy process of face-to-face negotiation between university professors and the members of the staff development committee, the project's focus changed to a reflective model of peer coaching.

In this reflective model—based primarily on the clinical supervision model espoused by Goldhammer, Cogan, and Garman—the coach took on the role of a colleague whose primary interest was to help the teacher reflect on the efficacy and appropriateness of his behavior, goals, beliefs, and values. The teacher assumed the role of the primary decision maker on the desirability of his teaching behavior, and the workshops became food for thought rather than prescriptions for practice. The reflective coaching model was intended to emphasize a collaborative relationship. The coach's role was to facilitate, to listen, and to engage the teacher in an ongoing dialogue about the meaning and implications of his intentions and actions in the classroom. The program, as proposed, was designed to be invitational rather than directive.

The aim of reflective coaching is to help teachers become more reflective and analytical, more self-directed, and more adept at identifying and implementing improvements in their instructional behavior and to help the teacher and coach acquire a better understanding of the teaching-learning process. Reflective coaching includes four major features:

- cycles of pre-conferencing, observation, and post-conferencing for examining how classroom events affect students and what relationship the events have to the teacher's espoused beliefs about teaching
- shared control over the process because both partners contribute necessary expertise
- norms of inquiry and experimentation that focus on testing hypotheses through data collected during observations
- continuity in the coaching process over time

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This model of reflective coaching is similar to Goldsberry's reflective supervision, Garmston's collegial peer coaching, and Schön's reflective coaching.²

PROJECT COMPONENTS

The project consisted of three parts. (1) eight full-day workshops on instructional techniques designed to provide a broad overview of current thinking on instruction, (2) five full-day workshops on peer coaching skills, and (3) ten cycles of coaching involving dyads of a doctoral student as coach and a teacher preparing to become a peer coach for the following year.

Workshops on Instruction

The eight workshops on instruction, conducted over eight months, were intended to give teachers a general awareness of many current models of instruction as well as to acquaint them with current professional literature on instruction. The topics included student motivation, teacher expectations and student achievement, lesson design, learning styles and the types of learning opportunities provided for students, questioning, thinking skills, cooperative learning, reading and writing across the curriculum, information-processing theory, and classroom management.

The workshops were intended only to introduce the teachers to the various topics and perhaps to provide an impetus for future study and experimentation. The teachers were not required to implement any of these behaviors but were encouraged to try out any behaviors that they considered potentially useful and that they felt capable of trying.

Workshops on Peer Coaching

The five workshops on peer coaching, held during the last three months of the project, were intended to give teachers a general understanding of the theory of reflective peer coaching as well as to equip them with a beginning level of skill in conferencing and data collection. The topics included data collection techniques (e.g., verbal flow, seating charts, selective verbatim, anecdotal note taking or scripting, frequency charts) and ways to create techniques to match teachers' instructional concerns. Conferencing techniques (e.g., active listening and information-giving skills), skills for conducting pre-observation and post-observation conferences, and data interpretation skills were also covered in the workshops. Aimed at skills development and imple-
Coaching Cycles

During the project, each coach and teacher dyad completed ten cycles of coaching. Each cycle consisted of a pre-observation conference (often conducted by telephone because of the 150-mile distance between the university and the school district), a classroom observation, and a post-observation conference. The teacher chose the focus for the observation and the conferences. There was no planned attempt to link the coaching cycles with the workshops on instructional techniques. For some coaching cycles, however, some teachers did decide to focus the cycle on ideas presented in the workshops. The rationale for including the ten cycles of coaching was to allow teachers to experience the process of being coached before coaching others as well as to provide a concrete model of the reflective coaching process.

The ten cycles of coaching, conducted between October and April, were preceded by an espoused platform conference and a "no-data" observation. During the espoused platform conference, the coach tried to gain through questioning and role-playing a clear understanding of the teacher's goals, beliefs, and values about teaching. Next, the coach observed the teacher in the classroom but did not collect data. At this observation, the coach got a better feel for the teaching context and the teacher's espoused platform in practice. This understanding of espoused platform and teaching context would help the coach view classroom events and analyze data from the teacher's perspective.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Data were gathered in several ways to assess the effects of the project for the teachers involved. Two separate data sources assessed the effect of the project on actual changes in teaching behavior. (1) At the midway point and at the final workshop, the teachers responded in writing to a question about any changes they perceived as having taken place in their teaching behavior as a result of the peer coaching program; (2) copies of all data collected during the coaching cycles confirmed teachers' claims that their behavior had changed. A variety of data types helped confirm the teachers' reported behavioral changes—interaction analysis, selective verbatim, verbal flow, teacher interaction with individual students, student engagement, anecdotal records, audiotapes, and videotapes.

At the midpoint and again at the end of the project, the teachers responded to another question: "In what ways, if any, has your thinking about

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teaching changed as a result of this program?" These two sets of written responses answered our question on the program's effect on teacher thinking.

We used a two-part process to interpret the teachers' written responses: (1) identification of each change in behavior or thinking listed in each teacher's individual written response to the question and (2) aggregation of individual changes in behavior or thinking into categories we could describe and label. To identify changes in teacher behavior, we used copies of the observational data to support or confirm self-reported changes in teaching behavior when possible. Observational data could not support or confirm all self-reported changes in behavior because specific data had not been collected to address each self-reported change in behavior.

Audiotaping all coaching interactions would have been the most preferred method for monitoring the process to ensure that reflective coaching actually took place. However, we decided not to tape for several reasons, especially so we would not create apprehension and concern among the teachers participating in the project. Several other mechanisms ensured that the doctoral students did implement reflective coaching. We monitored the actual coaching process through debriefings with doctoral students after each cycle and through discussions with teachers on their perceptions of what happened during conferences and observations. We built time for these discussions with teachers into each workshop. Also, seven teachers, who had registered for graduate course credit through the project, kept reflective journals on the coaching process, and we read and responded to these journals. A different doctoral student coached each of these seven teachers. Thus, the journals provided evidence on the coaching behavior of 7 of the 10 coaches. These journals served as an additional mechanism for ensuring that reflective coaching actually took place. We used a final data source to monitor the coaching process: the copies of observational data collected after each cycle. An examination of these four data sources—debriefings with coaches, discussions with teachers, reflective journals, and observational data—led us to conclude that the coaching process that actually took place was faithful to the identified tenets of reflective coaching.

EFFECTS FOR TEACHERS

Changes in Teaching Behavior

As a result of the project, 23 of the 25 teachers reported that their teaching behavior changed. Collected observational data supported some but not all of these self-reports. We classified the reported changes in specific teaching behaviors into five major categories that emerged from the data.

- questioning behavior
- classroom management
- use of different teaching strategies
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- greater use of techniques to increase student understanding
- elements of lesson design

The quotations below, taken from the final teacher responses to the question about changes in behavior, illustrate the types of changes the teachers reported in their own words.

Observational data supported all four types of changes in questioning behavior reported. (1) increasing their use of wait time one and wait time two, (2) asking more higher level questions (e.g., more inferential, opinion, and evaluative questions), (3) providing more specific, explanatory feedback to students and varying the types of feedback used, and (4) involving more students in questioning and discussion by using techniques such as calling on both volunteers and nonvolunteers as well as using signals.

This program has made me aware of how I can operate my classrooms to take advantage of my students' ability to think, to lead, and to help their fellow classmates. I have always used questions as a means of encouraging my students to think, however, I was never aware of the questions I was asking—in terms of their level of thinking. Today, I use wait time extensively, and I encourage my students to answer questions not with a single recall answer but with an answer that has forced them to think about the subject and to be able to relate their own knowledge to the subject area we are studying. (Teacher H)

The teachers identified four types of changes in classroom management. Observational data supported two. (1) using teacher movement and proximity control more often to manage student behavior and (2) using a greater variety of management techniques to deal with misbehavior (e.g., nonverbal intervention, pace changes, different types of verbal intervention). Observational data were not collected to verify two other changes. (1) organizing classroom materials and space differently to prevent problems from occurring and (2) rethinking the philosophy of classroom management and goals for classroom management and discipline.

If the teacher is organized and prepared, the atmosphere of the classroom will be conducive to learning. Teaching need not be confrontational or an us-against-them war. Smile, be pleasant, be friendly. They'll be more eager to learn. Don't worry, they are not going to take advantage of you. (Teacher P)

The teachers reported five specific changes in their use of different teaching strategies, although the observational data were not available to confirm them: (1) using cooperative learning; (2) using writing assignments and the writing process to clarify thinking and content; (3) making more attempts to accommodate a diversity of learning styles among students, (4) using thinking-skills strategies more often; and (5) using lecture as a teaching strategy less often.

My actual classroom behavior has changed in many ways. I am now more aware and know what cognitive and affective learning domains are and try to accommodate the varieties of learning styles that exist. I try to use positive and negative feedback more thoughtfully and use more of a question-and-answer teaching style with wait time for
student responses. I use lecture now only when introducing an area or to provide enough background for students to help develop their understanding and critical thinking. When I finish a lesson now, I reflect on what has been accomplished and how I might change anything that has been done during the lesson to improve it. (Teacher Q)

The observational data supported two specific changes in the teachers' greater use of techniques to increase student understanding. (1) using more questions and practice activities to check students' understanding and (2) reteaching concepts that did not seem clear to students more often. The teachers reported three other specific changes in this area that the observational data could not verify. (1) breaking content down into smaller pieces that are more understandable for students, (2) explaining concepts more clearly, and (3) teaching for student understanding, not content coverage.

I believe that I am more open and at ease in the classroom. I spend more time helping the students to organize themselves for work rather than being angry and frustrated because they won't listen. I state objectives more often and do spontaneous activities if I find that concepts are not clear. I am not so tied to lesson plans—if I discover a hole in their understanding—I try to fill it even if it means that I don't get to Wednesday's content until Friday. I am also doing more of what I regard as experimentation. I'll alter sequences of activities and lessons to try to discover a way to teach a concept that seems to work better for students. I try to have students understand how each lesson builds on the last one and leads to the next. My behavior has changed because I took the time to try a different way and step back to observe the results. Some of my behaviors are not where I want them to be. I too often forget to be aware of wait time. I realize that I don't praise enough. My questioning techniques are getting better, and when I get linear perspective to my satisfaction, I'll feel I've made real progress in terms of clarity. (Teacher E)

In the final category, elements of lesson design, the teachers identified four specific changes that the observational data did not confirm. (1) stating the lesson objectives more frequently, (2) planning for greater continuity across lessons; (3) using the steps in lesson design more consciously; and (4) providing more practice opportunities for students.

I have a more acute awareness of my verbal responses to students. I don't unnecessarily repeat my students' answers. I am much more aware of my proximity in the room. I utilize the steps in lesson design more fully. I provide more opportunities for students to participate in guided practice. I am more aware of my own learning style and try to provide my students with the maximum opportunity for learning. (Teacher O)

Changes in Thinking about Teaching

According to 23 of the 25 teachers, their thinking about teaching also changed as a result of the project. We classified the changes in thinking about teaching into four major categories:

- increases in teacher reflection and self-analysis
- increases in the teacher's feelings of power, control, self-confidence, and professionalism
- increases in active decision making before and during instruction
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- changes in the teacher's general approach to teaching and the teacher's goals for teaching

The quotations below illustrate several teachers' responses to the question about how the program affected their thinking about teaching.

They reported an increase in their own reflection and self-analysis in several ways. Some teachers reported a greater general awareness of what they were doing and why. Others reported that they spent more time trying to step back from their teaching and observe what was happening to students and to identify whether it was what they wanted to have happen. Others reported using writing to reflect on their teaching.

I have become more introspective concerning my own lessons. I have developed a feeling that I do have control over what happens in my classroom. My interest in improving my instruction has been renewed. It has helped me regain some lost self-esteem. My interest in trying new, simulating activities has been renewed. (Teacher A)

According to many teachers, this project gave them a feeling of having more power to control classroom events, and thus, they felt more self-confident. The teachers reported that by altering their own behavior during coaching cycles, they could examine how powerfully their behavior could influence student outcomes. This experimentation and analysis helped them to perceive the teacher as a more powerful agent in the classroom. Through data collection and analysis, the teachers also said, they recognized that many of their behaviors positively affected students. Therefore, they began to trust their own skills and judgments more. Some teachers said that they felt more confident and comfortable when they decided not to follow district curriculum guides or to use teaching methods different from the ones used by colleagues. Many teachers also reported that the opportunity to interact with a colleague in conferences and to examine their behavior with the data collected increased their own interest in professional renewal and made them feel better about their professional behavior on a daily basis.

Having had the opportunity to have data collected and see the results has led to reflection about some of the practices that have become habitual with me. It gives me a focus I didn't have before in trying out new things or eliminating undesirable behaviors. I have also gained more confidence in myself because I have seen that many of my behaviors are good ones. I have also learned that there are many areas in which teachers can make decisions and, therefore, gain the sense of having control over their own situations. I am relaxing a bit and using my own decisions more in setting priorities for learning in my classroom. I work as hard, but I don't feel as driven to cover what someone else has selected as important. I trust my own judgment and skills enough to know that most of the time I know what is best for my class. (Teacher L)

The teachers reported a third area of thinking affected, an increase in their active decision making before and during instruction. When planning lessons, the teachers reported, they spent more time trying to identify student needs and weighing the pros and cons of various instructional approaches. They also reported that they were more thoughtful and deliberate in their
thinking during instruction and found themselves considering research findings on teaching while they were in the midst of instructional activities.

This program has encouraged me to think more about my teaching platform and about teaching. Many decisions I made unconsciously have been brought to a greater level of awareness, so that even though I may end up making the same decision, I am now more conscious of the reasons for doing so. I am a much more reflective teacher. And that, along with the opportunity to discuss educational issues with a peer, has given me a new sense of professionalism. Along with my increased awareness of the countless decisions that teaching requires, I am also much more aware of the power I have for altering and improving what happens in my classroom and of my own control over my development as a teacher. And that has further increased the already strong feelings of satisfaction I get from teaching. (Teacher M)

Several teachers also said that their general approach to teaching and their goals for students changed as a result of this project. They described this change as movement toward a more student-centered approach to teaching. In this context, the teachers defined student-centered in two different but complementary ways. Several teachers reported that they now saw students as allies or partners in the learning process; therefore, these teachers allowed students to play a much greater role in making decisions about learning activities and about how to evaluate their learning. Other student-centered teachers focused on their views of the importance of covering content. Many of these teachers reported that they had been extremely concerned with content coverage but now felt less pressure to cover content and instead focused more on issues like student motivation and thinking. As a result, they began to think less about content and more about students and instructional strategies.

I always was concerned that my philosophy of education was not in line with what it should be. I tend not to like the structure of worksheets but tend to love the blank piece of drawing or composition paper that encourages children to create their own writing and create their own pictures and to color and to self-reflect. As a result of this project, my thinking about teaching is now less stressful because I can concentrate on my teaching strengths and not be concerned about my failure to fit the philosophy of those around me. My thinking has changed from concerns of content to which is the best model to use to teach a given concept to the particular group of children I have. (Teacher T)

LESSONS LEARNED AND WORKING HYPOTHESES

The effects of this project resulted from a combination of the workshops and the reflective coaching by well-prepared coaches committed to the reflective coaching model. Veteran teachers, perceived by colleagues and administrators as good teachers, volunteered for the project. A district that had never used long-term staff development projects carried out the reflective coaching model; thus, a novelty effect may have influenced the success of the project. These three factors require the reader to interpret any generalizations about
the effect of reflective coaching on veteran teachers cautiously as working hypotheses to be tested in subsequent studies.

Lesson 1

Given the opportunity to examine their own teaching and discuss it with a skilled coach in a collegial atmosphere, 23 of these 25 veteran teachers reported changing their classroom behavior. The changes ranged from relatively modest behaviors (e.g., increasing the amount of wait time used) to significant changes in teaching style (e.g., from almost completely using lectures to using lectures only to introduce new topics or provide essential background for higher level activities). Our hypothesis is that teachers who experience skilled reflective coaching on a regular basis over the length of an entire school year will make significantly more changes in their actual teaching behavior than teachers who do not experience such coaching.

Lesson 2

According to 23 of the 25 veteran teachers, their thinking about teaching changed; they became more aware of their behavior and made much more conscious decisions about teaching. Many teachers reported increased thinking and decision making both before and during instruction. Many teachers felt more confident in their teaching and experienced a renewed sense of professionalism. Many also reported feeling more in control of classroom events and feeling that they had the power to improve what was happening. Finally, the process forced many teachers to reexamine their goals for students and their general approach to teaching. From this reexamination, they became more student-centered and less focused on content. Changes in thinking about teaching are extremely powerful. They have the potential to influence teacher and student behavior dramatically. We hypothesize that veteran teachers who have the opportunity to engage in reflective coaching with skilled coaches will experience much more significant changes in their thinking about teaching than will veteran teachers who do not have that opportunity.

Lesson 3

The initial stages and cycles of reflective coaching can be difficult for both teachers and coaches. For most of the coaching dyads, the first three or four cycles were useful primarily for two purposes alone. (1) to establish clearly in the mind of the teacher how reflective coaching differs from traditional teacher observation and (2) to find a teacher-selected focus for the coaching process. To distinguish traditional teacher observation (which is really teacher evaluation) and reflective coaching, the teachers simply had to experience the difference for two or three cycles before they understood
what was supposed to happen. Merely describing the differences between the
two approaches was not sufficient.

Before the initial coaching cycles began, we made four attempts to
address this distinction: (1) We explained it during the first workshop; (2)
during the second workshop, we modeled and discussed a reflective coaching
cycle, (3) during the espoused platform conference and no-data observation,
the coach again explained how the reflective process would work and what
the role of teacher and coach would entail, and (4) during the project, we
labeled the cycle of conferring and observing as peer coaching to help the
teachers distinguish it clearly from teacher evaluation.

Nevertheless, most teachers did not understand or believe the distinction
between traditional observation and reflective coaching even after these
attempts. One teacher’s list of items he wanted the coach to observe for his
first cycle clearly illustrates this lack of understanding. grammar, enunciation,
clarity, level of questions, his affective relationship with students, whether he
made eye contact with students, whether the students were paying attention,
and whether his classes were well organized and well structured. Clearly, he
still saw coaching as the laundry-list type of evaluation so typical in

Only after two or three cycles did most teachers start to see and believe in
the difference between reflective coaching and teacher evaluation.

A second problem for many dyads was identifying a teacher-selected
focus for the coaching cycles. The teachers had never been asked before what
aspects of their classroom they wanted to examine with the help of another
professional. They didn’t know what the possibilities were. They expected the
coach to pick the focus and then give them feedback on their performance.
At first, many teachers asked the coach to pick the focus, but the coaches
refused, wanting to show in the initial stages of their relationship that this
process was teacher-driven. Many coaches did try to help by providing a brief
overview of various data collection devices and what aspects of behavior each
might apply to. In most cases, this overview of techniques resulted in the
teacher choosing a focus for the observation based on the seeming attractiveness
of the data collection technique. After collecting and analyzing the data,
neither teacher nor coach knew where the dyad was really headed. Thus, they
tended to analyze the data superficially at first, and so the dyads often had to
start over again in choosing a focus. Not until completing three or four cycles
could the teachers really begin to identify areas of interest and concern that
could drive the coaching process for multiple cycles. Perhaps the teachers
simply understood the process better at this point, perhaps they had estab-

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lished enough trust with their coaches so that they could share real concerns; or perhaps the workshops had provoked some interest in particular areas.

Whatever the reason, the first three or four cycles did not prove especially beneficial in examining teacher behavior or thinking. They established the relationship and helped the teacher understand the process and choose a focus to pursue in subsequent cycles. Our hypothesis is that significant changes in teacher behavior and thinking will not result from reflective coaching until after completing four or five cycles of coaching.

Lesson 4

Not all teachers accepted the concept of reflective coaching. Two teachers involved in the original planning for the project did not accept the reflective coaching model. They reported that participating in the project changed neither their teaching behavior nor their thinking about teaching. They had visited other staff development programs based on Hunter's model of instruction that used a technical approach to peer coaching in which the trainer observed and evaluated teachers as they tried to implement Hunter's model. Both teachers liked this model. They liked all the positive strokes the teacher got from the observer. They also saw the model as a way to make poor teachers better.

By contrast, they had great difficulty with reflective coaching. They wanted evaluative feedback from their coach. They knew they were doing a good job in the classroom and wanted the coach to praise them for their teaching. When the coach refused to judge their teaching effectiveness, they described the coach as merely a "scribe" and the entire process as "blah."

They were also concerned that this model would not force changes on poor teachers. They had originally envisioned their future role as peer coaches as helping or forcing teachers to bring their behavior more in line with the research on teaching. Because the reflective coaching model was not aimed in that direction, they went through the coaching cycles but were disillusioned by the process.

Obviously, we might explain the failure of the reflective coaching process in these two cases by saying that the coaches simply did a poor job, and thus, no change took place. We cannot completely discount this explanation; however, it loses some of its appeal when we consider the circumstances of the project. These two teachers had two different coaches. The coaches each also coached two other teachers, who reported that the project had influenced both their teaching behavior and their thinking about teaching. Therefore, we think that poor coaching was not responsible for the apparent failure of the process in these two cases. We hypothesize that teachers who do not accept the basic philosophy of reflective coaching—teachers who expect and prefer that the coach critique their teaching—will not experience changes in either their behavior or their thinking from participating in reflective coaching.
Lesson 5

Autonomy differs from empowerment. Many teachers reported that one major change in their thinking revolved around curriculum decisions. They reported that they now frequently made decisions to omit some of the content prescribed in the district guide so they could spend more time helping students better understand the content they considered important. This reported benefit of the project puzzled us. We assumed that the teachers had probably always made similar decisions about content, so we asked some of them what was different about the decisions during this project.

The teachers agreed that they had always made these decisions and explained the difference in the following way. When they had decided before not to cover content they were supposed to cover, they had done so "on the sly." They had never talked to anyone about the decision, they had never had to justify the decision to anyone, and they had never really had any evidence that spending more time on some content did increase student understanding. The process of reflective coaching forced them to share the decision with a colleague and to provide some rationale for it, in some cases, the observational data provided clear evidence that reteaching content a second time did increase student understanding. The teachers always had the freedom or autonomy to cover content as they saw fit, but they didn't feel empowered to do so until they had the opportunity to discuss the rationale for their decisions with a colleague and to use the observational data to examine the effect of their decisions. We hypothesize that teachers who have the opportunity to discuss the rationale for professional decisions with colleagues are more likely to feel empowered than those who do not have such opportunities, even if all teachers enjoy the same amount of autonomy.

CONCLUSION

What effect does skilled reflective coaching have for veteran teachers? We do not know for sure. This project provides hypotheses for future testing, not generalizable conclusions. Here, however, reflective coaching did have multiple positive effects on the teachers.

To conclude, we present one teacher's answer to the question of how reflective coaching affected her. The teacher's name is Marge. She has had 20 years' teaching experience in the same building at the 2nd grade level. When the project began, she was alienated. In her own words, she volunteered for the project "to get out of the building for workshop days and to be able to eat lunch like normal people." By the end of the project, Marge had made a complete turnaround. The project so motivated her that she demanded to read every one of her principal's past copies of Educational Leadership,
and she took a university course on thinking skills during the following summer.\(^5\)

Reflective coaching is more than data collecting. It's conversation. It's asking a teacher to think beyond what she says. It's asking her to be honest about how she really feels. If every teacher in America could have the same encouragement and the same reflective type of conversation we had, then teachers would be ready to finally defend themselves to governments and to the public as to their fine training and their expertise at the job. From my peer coaching, I learned I was a good teacher in an exciting classroom. I learned to be aggressive enough to have a positive conversation with my principal—to tell him what I really needed—to relate in such a way as to receive his positive support for what I needed. (Marge)

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